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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BISHKEK 000626

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN (GEHRENBECK)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/25/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [KDEM](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR NEUMANN BRIEFS POLITICAL HEAVY HITTERS  
ON AFGHANISTAN

REF: BISHKEK 597

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Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In an effort to reaffirm the importance of Manas Airbase operations, SCA Special Envoy for Assistance to Afghanistan Ambassador Neumann briefed key government officials on military activity and reconstruction efforts currently underway in Afghanistan. Prime Minister Atambayev summarized the numerous problems related to the base and requested assistance for Kyrgyz businessmen eager to compete for reconstruction contracts in Afghanistan. Parliamentarians, straight from the hearings on the base, reasserted their views about the presence of coalition forces and questioned the continued need for Manas Airbase. However, members of the Security Council showed the most support, clearly understanding the vital role that Kyrgyzstan plays. End Summary.

THE MESSAGE TO THE POLITICAL ELITE  
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12. (C) During a visit to Bishkek on May 23-24, former Ambassador to Afghanistan Ronald Neumann met with numerous senior-level government policymakers, parliamentarians and civil society leaders. Ambassador Neumann briefed senior officials on military operations and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. He painted a stark choice between coalition victory and defeat and what it would mean for the region, including Kyrgyzstan. He reminded his interlocutors of the continued fight against the Taliban insurgency, and that amidst much progress, much additional rebuilding is needed. He emphasized support for Afghanistan and highlighted the multinational contributions of troops and assistance to Afghanistan. He fielded questions related to Manas Airbase and refuted rumors linking Manas Airbase to military strikes on Iran. He addressed the mixed picture regarding drug cultivation in Afghanistan. He thanked Kyrgyzstan for allowing coalition forces to use Manas Airbase, and expressed hope that this support would continue.

13. (C) Over tea with Chairman of the Human Rights Commission Tursunbek Akun, leader of the NGO Kylym-Shamy Aziza Abdirasulova, Omurbek Abdrakhmanov of the For Reforms opposition movement, and leader of the NGO Interbilim Asiya Sasykbayeva, Ambassador Neumann described the current situation in Afghanistan and fielded questions about the ongoing presence of Manas Airbase. Akun, a boisterous critic of the U.S. military presence, changed his tune by agreeing that the base plays a vital role in creating stability and rebuilding Afghanistan and that he was in favor of a continued presence. Sasykbayeva asked about the activities of civil society groups in Afghanistan and Abdirasulova expressed concern over the education of Afghan youths, suggesting an increase in exchange programs. Abdrakhmanov openly worried about Kyrgyzstan leaning towards Islamic fundamentalism, citing examples like the increase in women wearing the hijab, public discussions about establishing a caliphate, and government officials debating the issue of polygamy. He believed that the U.S. military presence acted as a counterbalance to religious radicalism and expressed his gratitude.

PM ATAMBAYEV: MUST COMBAT BASE PROBLEMS WITH USG CONTRACTS

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14. (C) After Neumann's briefing on Afghanistan, Prime Minister Almaz Atambayev outlined the current situation with the base, listing a number of problems. He noted that, at that moment, parliamentary hearings to discuss the necessity of the base were underway. He said that inaccuracies during the procedures to establish the agreement left discrepancies and loopholes upon which some politicians could capitalize

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and demand renegotiations. He stated that harsh media criticism of the airbase significantly reduces its many positive aspects. He indirectly linked offers of significant loans from Russia, China and Kazakhstan to pressure on the issue of the base. As a possible counter to these offers, Atambayev expressed his hope that Washington would favorably consider funding Kyrgyzstan's Millennium Challenge program.

15. (C) Atambayev clearly intended to steer discussions toward boosting Kyrgyz access to Afghan reconstruction contracts. The Prime Minister stressed his desire for supply and reconstruction contracts to be awarded to Kyrgyz businessmen. He suggested that using Manas Airbase as a shipping hub for Kyrgyz goods heading for Afghanistan could be a "way to combat the anti-base rhetoric." Atambayev stated that numerous Kyrgyz businesses were eager to participate in reconstruction projects, thus playing their part in stabilizing the economy of Afghanistan.

NICE TRY BUT ALL CONTRACTS MUST BE FAIR AND COMPETITIVE

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16. (C) Ambassador Neumann stressed that, knowing the strategic dangers to Central Asia should efforts in Afghanistan fail, Kyrgyz government officials should combat the negative press by explaining to the public the larger picture and how the base supports Kyrgyz interests. Regarding reconstruction efforts, Neumann stated clearly that contracts are not allocated to any specific country. He added that funneling contracts to Kyrgyzstan would violate regulations that are in place to ensure a fair and competitive bidding process and prevent corruption. The Ambassador said that U.S. specialists successfully trained Afghan businessmen to search for U.S. tenders, fill out the appropriate documentation and write up a competitive bid to win contracts for goods and services. He offered to facilitate similar training for Kyrgyz business leaders. The Prime Minister welcomed this offer as a way to simultaneously

support the reconstruction effort and boost the Kyrgyz economy.

#### PARLIAMENTARIANS VOICE OPINIONS TO AMBASSADORS

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17. (C) Fresh out of parliamentary hearings about the base, Speaker of Parliament Marat Sultanov and two parliamentarians, head of the Committee for International Policy Nurdin Abdyldayev and head of the Committee for Constitutional Legislation Iskhak Masaliyev, met with Ambassador Neumann to discuss operations in Afghanistan and continued use of the base. While Sultanov acted as a neutral party in the discussions, he introduced the other MPs as representatives of both sides of the debate, stating that Abdyldayev was generally in support of Manas Airbase and U.S. efforts in Afghanistan while Masaliyev absolutely objected to the military presence at Manas.

BAD COP

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18. (C) Masaliyev, the leader of the Communist Party and head of a committee participating at the hearings, stated that he had objected to the U.S. military base from the beginning. He maintained that the base could make Kyrgyzstan a target, and that his country must not become the arena for clashes between nations such as the U.S., China and Russia. Regarding the base shooting, he said that "with hundreds of young soldiers walking around with weapons, there is bound to be a tragedy." However, he went on to state that they must be held accountable and that it seems to him that "American soldiers have more immunities than parliamentarians." (Note: Masaliyev has agreed to go on a USG-sponsored trip to Afghanistan in mid-June. End Note.)

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19. (C) Abdyldayev stated that he has benefited financially from reconstruction activity in Afghanistan, citing sales from his glass factory to Afghan buyers since 2002. He agreed with the original decision to allow coalition forces to be based at Manas. However, he felt that the agreement was originally for only one year and asked why, five years later, the base was still needed. He believed that, as members of parliament, it was their duty to protect their people from the many unresolved issues related to the base, to include complaints of U.S. planes jettisoning their fuel near the base. He asked why the U.S. has not allowed an environmental investigation into the impact of the base.

#### THE GOLDEN MIDDLE

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110. (C) Sultanov, who kept a firm grip on the meeting to ensure his colleagues did not get out of hand, raised concerns at the increased drug supply from Afghanistan. He also raised the September aircraft collision and noted that the Russians had drastically increased rates on the Bishkek-Moscow flight, since the Kyrgyz can no longer offer competition.

111. (C) Ambassador Neumann countered that although there is inherent risk in supporting operations in Afghanistan, there are also risks in not supporting those missions, noting that a resurgence of the Taliban would be a security threat to Central Asia. He said that the base agreement was indefinite but that the vital role played by Kyrgyz support for the base would continue until the war in Afghanistan ended. America has no interest in staying beyond the current crisis but the insurgency continues and it is wrong to believe it is over. Also, Neumann noted the base serves as an essential transport

hub for the other countries, including small ones like Lithuania, Iceland and Croatia that have forces in Afghanistan. He noted that U.S. service members do not enjoy immunity but are under U.S. jurisdiction and provided an example from Afghanistan where a service member was convicted in the U.S. for his actions. Ambassador Yovanovitch also pointed out that recently the base, working with the GOKG, had established new safety procedures and that CENTAF was financing a \$1.4 mm safety package at the airport. Neumann also suggested more tours of the base, allowing parliamentarians an opportunity to witness daily operations, see that the Americans have nothing to hide, and hear more about the procedures their government has worked out.

#### SECURITY COUNCIL SHOWS SUPPORT FOR MANAS

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¶12. (C) Several members of the Security Council from the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs welcomed the briefing on Afghanistan by Ambassador Neumann and expressed their support for the ongoing operations. The Kyrgyz officials asked follow-up questions about an estimated time-line for operations in Afghanistan, reasons for Neumann's optimism of the war, ongoing efforts to disarm warlords, the hunt for Osama bin Laden, and comparisons of the effectiveness of Manas Airbase operations in 2001 versus the present. The Kyrgyz officials also stated their desire to play a larger role in reconstruction efforts.

#### COMMENT

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¶13. (C) At a time when politicians and the media attempt to sway public opinion about the presence of coalition forces, Ambassador Neumann's briefings offered an essential opportunity to address many of the key policymakers and government officials in the middle of the heated debate over the airbase. The information also provided more ammunition for those defending the base and several valid reasons to sway the minds of those so avidly opposed to it.

¶14. (U) This cable has been cleared by Ambassador Neumann.

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